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MySpace.com To Bolster Security Measures: CEO

In the wake of two more arrests of sexual predators who met their underage victims on the site, **MySpace.com** is implementing stricter security measures and recruiting a new executive to oversee security and education programs.

BOSTON (Reuters) - **MySpace.com**, the online virtual-community run by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.., will soon add technology to screen how its 60 million members use the Web site to prevent crime, the company's chief executive said on Thursday.

He discussed the enhanced security plan in an interview, several hours after federal authorities announced the arrests of two men charged with using **MySpace** to arrange illegal sexual encounters with minors.

MySpace chief executive Chris DeWolfe declined to discuss the arrests or say how specifically the new security technology will work. The company will give details in an announcement in the coming weeks, he said.

DeWolfe said he's also in the midst of recruiting an executive to spearhead the company's security and safety education programs.

The new security chief is likely to have strong experience in working with the Internet as well as a background in security and perhaps law enforcement, DeWolfe said.

The arrests in Connecticut were announced as MySpace looks to deflect a growing public outcry following a spate of news reports about criminal activities allegedly arranged over the site.

Although it is not the only Internet service that's vulnerable to criminals, recent media reports have focused on MySpace.

Federal officials on Thursday charged Sonny Szeto, 22, of New York with using the site to meet an 11-year-old girl. They also charged Stephen Letavec, 39, of Pennsylvania with using it to meet a 14-year-old girl.

Kevin O'Connor, the U.S. federal Attorney for Connecticut who announced the charges, said that MySpace was not at fault and that full blame lies with the two defendants.

O'Connor also said that he does not intend to ask MySpace to take any specific action to discourage future abuse of the site.

But Richard Blumenthal, the attorney general for Connecticut's state government, has called on MySpace to tighten access to the site and improve its age verification system.

MySpace and Blumenthal's office are in negotiations over the attorney general's request. DeWolfe declined to comment on the status of those talks, saying that his company's objectives are "aligned" with those of Blumenthal.

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"We've had productive talks," DeWolfe said. "I can't discuss it too much."

He said that MySpace already has several measures in place to prevent abuse. It prohibits children under age 14 from using the site. It also restricts access to the profiles of 14- and 15-year-olds, allowing them to be contacted only by users that they add to their buddy lists.

MySpace uses software designed to identify minors, flagging profiles with terms likely to be used by children under age 14. Some 200,000 profiles have been deleted from the site on suspicion that users had lied about their age.

But DeWolfe said that the system is not foolproof and that no Web site has developed technology to verify the age of all users reliably.

One of the most effective tools against abuse are warnings and educational messages that MySpace posts on its site, DeWolfe said. "We think that education is the most important piece.."

(Additional reporting by Eric Auchard and Kenneth Li.)

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